

ary Dorcas Wilson was born on September 1, 1924 in Sans Souci, NSW to parents Albert and Mary (hereafter referred to as Mary Sr.). Baby Mary's arrival into this world was turbulent, to say the least.

On the way to the delivery the midwife, Nurse Readman, fell from a horse and sulky and broke her wrist. Because of the injury, Nurse Readman didn't tie the cord properly. When relatives Aunty Florrie and Uncle Harry picked up baby Mary a couple of hours later, they realised the baby had been lying in a pool of blood. Had it not been noticed, Mary may have bled to death. The early adversity didn't end there. At around two or three years old, Mary

developed bronchial pneumonia and whooping cough. The family lived at 60 Fraters Avenue, Sans Souci, in the home of their Aunty Bridget – better known to the family as Grandma Killiby – and Mary Sr. used to wheel young Mary around Sans Souci in a pram while men were tarring the roads across Taren Point Punt at low tide. Supposedly, the smell of tar and seaweed helped to clear the lungs. And perhaps it worked, because Mary's health soon improved, and she began to grow into a spirited young girl.

In those days, you could start school as soon as you turned five (no matter the time of year), so Mary began her education at Sans Souci in September of 1929. She and her siblings – including elder brother Bertie and, eventually, younger siblings Billy, Beatty and Betty - would walk over paddocks to get to school, even in the pouring rain. On the way home, Bertie would bring in Nellie the cow from the paddock, as it was his job to milk her.

Mary loved school – unlike Billy, who hated it. Often, Billy would pretend to be sick, and halfway through the day the teachers would ask Mary to take him home. This made her mad "I used to belt him up all the way home because he was making me miss school," Mary says. "Then Mum would send him down to the laundry without any lunch. But because he was

Grandma Killiby's favourite, she'd take him food and sneak him back into the house." Walter Desmond Ferguson – Des for short – was born on August 17, 1925, in Morrinsville, New Zealand. He immigrated to Australia with his mother, Olive Ferguson, and brother Robert when Des was just three months old. They lived in Enmore, in Sydney's Inner West, with Olive's stepfather, Walter David Grant, and from 1926 with their stepfather, John Henry McCrory,

father to Des's younger siblings Betty and John. Sadly, John died from diphtheria at the age of four.

Des attended Enmore Activity School, but he was never very much of a scholar. Teachers often sent him to sit in the dunce's corner, and he was always getting in trouble for mischievous acts like dipping girls' pigtails in the inkwell. He was hit over the knuckles for writing left-handed and continued to be hit until he learned to write with his right. It wasn't too surprising, then, that Des soon decided school wasn't for him. At age 11, with only basic maths and spelling skills, he left.

His school days behind him, Des set about finding work. He was a good worker, but as he was born into the era of the Great Depression, holding on to a gig was tough. He changed jobs regularly. His quest for work did, however, take him all over the country, from rural NSW – where he spent some time dipping, castrating and shearing sheep as a rouseabout on a farm – to even working as a cane cutter in Queensland.

Olive and John had married in 1934, and it followed that in Des's early teens, Des decided to take his stepfather's surname. While he never changed it

legally, he went by Walter Desmond McCrory for the rest of his life. Des and his brother Robert were also skilled boxers. They both competed in the middleweight class. But Des wasn't just a fighter – he was also a hell of a dancer, as Mary would one day discover. More on that soon...

The lean years

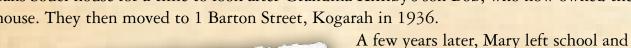
The Great Depression of the 1930s was tough on most Australians, and Mary's family was no exception. Her father Albert often couldn't find work, so the family had to make do with relief coupons once a fortnight. "You didn't get money – just coupons for the grocer, baker, milkman, butcher and greengrocer. And you could only go to certain shops," Mary explains.

Occasionally, Albert picked up a few days' work helping to build the sea wall in Botany Bay. But when that happened, he was ineligible for the coupons. It was one or the other. "Of course, we were lucky we lived with Grandma Killiby, as at least we had no rent to pay," Mary says.

Struggles aside, Mary has countless fond memories from those days growing up by the water in Sans Souci. "We used to chase soldier crabs, tread for cockles and mussels, and also get oysters and

periwinkles off the rocks," she recalls. "And we learnt to swim when Uncle Harry took us out in his fishing boat, pushed us over and made us swim to shore!" As lean as that era was, it taught the Wilson kids to be resourceful. Sometimes, they'd sell hot water to picnickers on the beach; other times, they'd pick strawberries and sell those too. Occasionally, they were downright cheeky in their quest for a quick buck – or a penny, as the case may be. "We had a little creek just down the street with pipes running under the tramlines," Mary recalls. "We used to hide in the pipes and swear and be rude to the

tram driver, and he would throw a hunk of coal down at us. We would get a halfpenny from Grandma Killiby for this, as we only had a fuel stove and a laundry copper that ran on wood!" In 1932, dearly loved Grandma Killiby passed away. The Wilson family stayed in the Sans Souci house for a time to look after Grandma Killiby's son Bob, who now owned the house. They then moved to 1 Barton Street, Kogarah in 1936.



started working at the Hills shoe-making factory in Redfern. Her wage was 12s 6d (12 shillings and sixpence) – about \$1.25 in modern currency. After Christmas of 1939 she moved to Woolworths, where her wage almost doubled to £1 2/-, 3d (one pound, two shillings and three pence). By the time she finished up at Woolies in 1944, she'd been promoted to the confectionery counter, where she earned £3 2/-, 6d (three pounds, two shillings and sixpence).



Outside of work, Mary was very social and had many good friends. On Sundays, she'd take a steam train south to Austinmer to go hiking and picnicking with a big crowd of girls and boys. Sometimes, they'd get out at Heathcote and hike to Waterfall or go to the Royal National Park.

She also loved to dance. "During the war I used to dance nearly every night at Harris Hall at Ramsgate," Mary says. "And I always had to take Billy with me." (Of course, now that they were grown, Billy was somewhat better behaved and she didn't have to belt him up the whole way!) Sometimes, Mary would venture even further afield for her love of dancing, to famous dance halls closer to the city like Albert Palace, Surreyville and the Trocadero. Come Easter, Mary and the Woolies crowd

would rent a cottage up north at Woy Woy and take the train there on Holy Thursday night after work. "We'd come back in on Saturday for work, because if you didn't come to work on the Saturday you wouldn't get paid for Friday

or Monday," Mary says. "We'd then go back on Saturday afternoon and come home on

Monday for work on Tuesday. "There was always plenty to do," Mary continues. "We had army camps at Moorefield Racecourse and Scarborough Park. Our house was the halfway house for all the boys from both camps. And a crowd of us girls also went every Saturday to watch St George play league. We used to go rain, hail or shine, and we wore red-and-white scarves and beanies. Real ratbags we were.'



While Mary was doing her best at home in Sydney, Des

was off serving his country. On February 10, 1943, at the age of 17, he joined the 2/6th Australian Cavalry Commando Regiment, which fought in New Guinea against the Japanese. Because he was only 17, he had to lie about his date of birth. He changed it from August 17, 1925 to February 1, 1925 so he could pass as an 18-year-old and enlist.

The 2/6th fought in New Guinea until the end of the war, during which time it was involved in the costly Aitape-Wewak campaign. Des served in 9 section C troop, where he earned the nickname "Log" for his ability to sleep through a very noisy night.

At the war's end, the 2/6th had 141 casualties, including 38 killed. In 1946, the regiment began to be disbanded, and on November 7, 1946 Des's time with the 2/6th came to an end. He returned home to Australia.

Shortly after that, he met the love of his life. By the time the war was over, Mary had left Woolworths for a job at the Wills Tobacco Factory in Kensington. She and her workmates at Wills would go to St Johns Church, not far from Central Station, to dance. Upon returning home, Des started to attend those dances too and, as touched upon earlier, the young man certainly wasn't shy of a dance move. "I remember the first dance I saw him at," Mary recalls. "He came in drunk, and I said to my friend, Old Ted, 'See that drunk over there? One day I'm going to marry him – he's such a good dancer!"

Sure enough, that same night, Des asked Mary to dance. Soon after, they began dating. "I can always remember the first picture he took me to see," Mary says. "It was Madonna of the Seven Moons with Stewart Granger." Another time, they crossed the harbour on a date to Taronga Zoo. On most of their dates, however, Des and Mary went dancing. They were so good together that they were sometimes asked to give exhibitions. Meanwhile, Des continued with his other passion, boxing, and Mary would often go to Leichhardt Oval to watch him fight.

The young couple were in love, and wedding bells soon followed. On June 28, 1947, Des and Mary were married at the Presbyterian Church in Kogarah. The reception was held

at Mary's parents' house on Barton Street. "I borrowed my

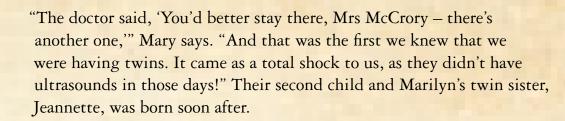
because in 1948, Mary fell pregnant.

wedding dress and Beatty's bridesmaid dress, and after the reception we went back to Des's mum's and picked up some basins and a chamber pot, and then spent our wedding night at 46 Cavendish Street, Stanmore," Mary recalls. At that time, it was difficult for newlyweds to get a rental place, but Des and Mary managed to find a cheap onebedroom flat in Stanmore. Three months later, they were offered half a house in Barton Street, Kogarah. "The owner promised us we'd get the whole house when she moved, but that didn't happen because her daughter came home and so we had to find somewhere else to live," Mary says. "So, we went to my mum's. We had the back bedroom, Mum and Dad had the front bedroom, Beatty and Betty had the other front bedroom, and Bill and his wife Valda had the middle one. Val and I took turns cooking for the four of us." It was a big family. And it was about to get even bigger,



Des and Mary were expecting their first child in February of 1949. As the New Year arrived, however, Mary was gaining weight much quicker than normal. "I had put on a stone in weight in just two weeks, so I went to the doctor and he told me to go and have an x-ray to find out why," Mary says. "When I got to the hospital they decided to keep me there, but before I could have the X-ray, I went into labour.'

And so, on January 6, 1949, the couple's first child, Marilyn, was born. However, a surprise was in store for Des and Mary.



The fraternal twins were small enough to fit into a shoebox together. Developmentally, the girls were quite different. "Marilyn was described as being born as a seven-month-old, and Jeannette as an eight-month-old," Mary recalls. "Both were put into a crib and wrapped in cotton wool with a hot water bottle, as there were no such things as humidicribs in those days."

The young family continued to live at Barton Street until they were finally offered the residence over the barber's shop on the corner of Barton Street and Rocky Point Road, Kogarah. They owned no furniture, so they went into the city and bought a double bedroom suite, a wooden kitchen suite (including four chairs, a table and a cabinet), a lounge suite, a sewing machine and a radio – all on a payment plan for a total of £296. They were also given an ice chest and a three-quarter bed for free.

> Money remained scarce. Des found work as a wharf labourer, but the "Wharfies" were always on strike and, consequently, Des was only paid about £5 per week. Out of that, £1 10/- (one pound and 10 shillings) went towards rent, and another £1 10/- went towards furniture repayments, leaving just £2 per week for Des and Mary to feed themselves and their

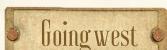
In 1953, Des left the wharves and briefly worked at Speares' Brickworks at St Peters. During this time, Mary fell pregnant once again. At around the same time, the army once again came calling for Des. In 1954, he decided to re-enlist and went to Kapooka for training. Des was at Kapooka when Mary gave birth to John on July 23, 1954. Happily, Des was allowed home on the weekends to see his family and spend some time with his first son.

> During his second stint in the army, Des continued to pursue his love of boxing. However, he also acquired a range of useful new skills "He learned a lot while he was there," Mary says. "He learned to drive, did a storeman's course, a typing course, a P.T. instructor's course." Having left school at age 11 to work, it was almost like the tertiary education Des never had. Even better was that while he was doing the courses, he was stationed mainly at French Street, Rockdale just up the road from Kogarah – so he was able to spend plenty of time with Mary and his growing kids.

While all of Des's newfound skills came in handy, he soon for one he excelled at above all others: cooking. In fact, he was such a good cook that he stuck with it for the rest of his time in the army, and eventually this became his main source of income. "Once Des took up cooking, he was everywhere," Mary says. "Wallgrove Ingleburn, Bringelly. And he only came home every couple of nights as they used to work 48 hours on and 24 hours off."

After John was born, the doctor told Mary it would be a "onein-a-million chance" that she'd fall pregnant again. "So, Des and I threw caution to the wind," Mary says. "Three years later, Dr Turns came to the house to see John, as he was sick – and I was quite heavily pregnant. I said to him, 'Look at this - you said I wouldn't have any more!' He just replied, 'Well, I did say one in a million!"

Des and Mary's fourth and last child, Heather, was born on November 13, 1957. The McCrory family was complete.



In 1959, as Sydney sprawled west, Des and Mary saw a house-and-land package at Grant Street, Blacktown selling for £3,163 with a £300 deposit. They didn't have the money, so Albert and Mary Sr. lent it to them. Des signed all of the papers, but then had to go up to Sarina, in Queensland, with the army for three months. Albert helped out a lot while Des was away. "Dad used to bring us up to Blacktown in his ute with a canopy nearly every weekend while the

house was being built," Mary says.

While Des was in Sarina, he ran a two-up school, and he won enough money to pay back his parents-in-law rather quickly. On August 17, 1959 (Des's birthday – the real one!), the

At that time, Grant Street and the surrounding areas were little enrolled and began attending straight after the September holidays. the principal, Mr Jones, was only taking children with transfer forms

Marayong Public soon became a big part of the family's life –

so not only did Mary join the P&C and the Mothers Club, but she also started a makeshift canteen with the help of her friend Betty Harvey.

"There was no canteen at the school when it first opened," Mary says. "Betty and I used to sit outside the school gates – Betty at the Richmond Road gate and me at the Davis Road gate – and take lunch orders. We'd then take the orders back to Betty's place on Richmond Road, make the lunches, and then deliver them back to school at lunchtime."

In 1968, a canteen finally opened within the school grounds. Mary was given the job as manageress. She would

continue as manageress until her retirement in 1984, during which time she had 68 women working under her as volunteers. Mary was also made an Honorary Prefect of the school and a life member of the P&C. "I made many friends over the years in the canteen both parents and teachers," she says. "I even introduced Heather to her husband there!"

In addition to the school, Des and Mary joined Blacktown Workers Club. At the time, the club operated out of an old tin shed – a far cry from the multipurpose venue that operates today. Not only did the club provide entertainment for the adults, but it also gave the kids plenty of opportunities to play sport. John was already playing football for Blacktown Leagues Club, so he stayed there, but Heather played netball for the Workers for many years. Furthermore, Mary became very involved in netball at the Workers; she managed many teams and held the positions of secretary and treasurer at different times. She was eventually made a Life Member of the Blacktown Workers Netball Club

"Blacktown was good for us," Mary says. "The kids grew up in Grant Street with lots of other young families who moved in not long after we did. As Grant Street is a dead end, the kids could always play safely in the street and there were plenty of cricket matches and the like to keep them occupied. We also used

to have gates between the yards, so the kids could pass from yard to yard easily. It was a really friendly street, and the adults got on as well as the kids."



During the years at Blacktown, Des remained a cook in the army, splitting his time between Wallgrove, Bringelly and Ingleburn. As the kids got older, he would often take them to camp with him on weekends. John and Heather in particular would join him regularly.

Des was also often called away on bivouacs. One time, he went back to Kapooka (where his second stint in the army began) to complete his School Certificate so he could become a corporal. "Because he left school when he was about 11, he didn't have much of a formal education," Mary says. "But he taught himself a lot of things through reading. He was very interested in Greek mythology, and he taught himself to spell properly by constantly doing crossword puzzles. When he was doing the course at Kapooka he would travel home every weekend so that John and Heather could help him with his homework!" Their help – and his own hard work, of course – must have paid off, because Des passed the School Certificate and became

Corporal Desmond McCrory. While bivouacs took him away for a short time each year, Des spent his longest time away from home in 1973-74 when he was stationed as a cook on Lord Howe Island for about six months during the construction of the island's airstrip. "He came home in April 1974 and the two of us took our first ever holiday together," Mary says. "We planned to travel to Queensland and spend a month touring around, but after 10 days he decided we had to come home. He was breeding budgies at the time and was missing his birds!"

Unknown to the couple at the time, however, was that Des had developed lung cancer. He had been misdiagnosed in April and was being treated for a lung infection, bronchitis and pneumonia. In October 1974, the doctors changed their diagnosis to cancer. "We were told that he could live two weeks, two months or two years. They couldn't tell us definitely," Mary says. It would turn out to be about five months. Des passed away at

Ingleburn Military Hospital on February 22, 1975. He was 49 years old, and gone far too soon. Marilyn and Jeannette were 26 years old at the time, John was 20, and Heather was 17. Des was a true gentleman and a gentle soul – chivalrous,

respectful of women, and with never a bad word to say about anyone. He was strong, determined, and patient, while also being fiercely protective of his family. He had a dry sense of humour and loved a practical joke (Mary bore the brunt of many of them!), but also instilled in his children a firm sense of right and wrong.

Naturally, Mary was devastated. She had lost the love of her life, and at a time when he was due to retire and the couple were

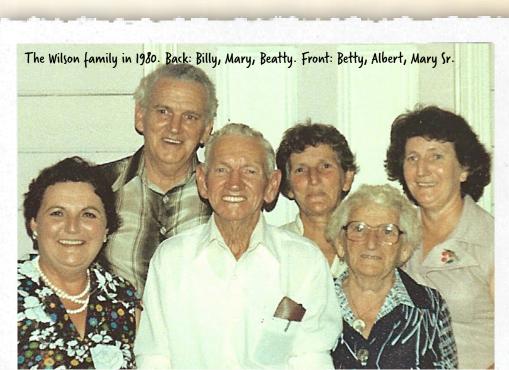
planning to start taking more holidays and do the things they hadn't had time to do before. Still, Mary pushed on. She continued to throw herself into her role as canteen manager at Marayong Public School until her retirement in 1984. Mary was considered a member of the staff there; she was always invited to staff social nights and often hosted after-school drinks at her house on Grant Street. Indeed, her nickname was "Mrs Marayong", because she knew and could tell you more about the school, and the thousands of families and kids that had passed through, than anyone else.

Mary was also kept busy by 13 grandkids - Sandy, Janine, Shane, Russell, Brett, David, Samantha, Kelly, Jason, Melissa, Therese, Grant and Danielle – who would come to visit her regularly. She travelled to Singapore to see her brother Bertie's grave at Kranji War Cemetery, becoming the only member of her immediate family to have seen it. She went to Japan and

took a trip to Cairns with one of her good friends. She joined exercise groups, enjoyed her knitting and craft activities, and didn't mind a flutter on the ponies.

Mary was a proud, intelligent woman with a strong sense of family and right and wrong. She was a passionate, loving and caring mother, but also very strict; because Des was away a lot, she was usually the disciplinarian. However, she supported and protected her family no matter what, enjoyed life, and lived for her kids and her husband.

She passed away on March 25, 2006, no doubt to share a dance with Des once more.







McCrorys moved into their new home in Blacktown. more than dirt tracks, and from the house, Des and Mary could see Marayong Public School. Marilyn, Jeannette and John were "We could watch them walk to school from the front verandah," Mary says. "They were actually lucky to get into the school because from their previous school."

not just for the children who attended, but also for Mary, who got involved in a lot of school activities. Marayong had been mostly rural up until this point, and the school was newly established,

Des and Mary's kids each share a memory of life growing up with their parents.

[*arilyn: "*I often helped Dad with his army boot pit polishing them and polishing his belt buckles with asso while discussing our day. Every Saturday, Mum and I cooked cakes and biscuits, and I made rissoles for tea as Dad liked my rissoles. One night we had steak and kidney stew, and Dad and I discussed my day at school where I had them. Another time, Dad decided to cook at home and used almos cut up a rat in biology. Just as Mum was eating a bit of kidney, I said all of the pots and pans in the kitchen and then wouldn't wash up we'd also dissected the kidney. Mum wouldn't eat any more of the stew Mum said, 'That's the last bloody time you cook in my kitchen.'" and told us we couldn't talk about biology at the table any more. Dad and I thought it was funny as we continued to eat our stew."

🥻 for (hristmas, and a couple of them ran around 🥅 the yard (with their heads off) — it was so funnı Mum had to pluck and gut/clean them. I hated helping out with the plucking, but I loved gutting

PS IN 1911

This is the story of a couple who endured both a

Great Depression and a World War, found each other

at a dance, and built a loving life together in Sydney.

bn: "I remember the day that Dad and re working in our veggie garden and Mum was hanging the clothes on the line. Both Mum and Dad were giving each other a hard time, joking and laughing with each other Then, out of the blue, Dad upends Mum, dipping her headfirst into the liquid manure drum! When he put her down they bot just laughed. Mum and Dad always shared a connection. At the usual street gatherings and parties you would catch them

looking at each other with a glint in their eyes — in love!"

Heather: "Mum and Dad always had plenty o

love to share and spare. They made my friend feel welcome and our house was often the place for my friends to congregate. They made them feel like a part of our family; they would be fed talked at and to, teased, listened to and made to feel comfortable So comfortable, in fact, that if I wasn't home, my friends happily stayed and spent time with my parents until I got there."



